

The Republican Model and the Crisis of National Liberalism

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Abstract: This paper evaluates the prospects of a republican alternative to national liberalism. It draws on Max Weber to provide an account of how national liberalism is meant to work. It examines some of the tensions that emerge from this account, and some of the ways liberals and nationalists have tried to deal with these tensions. Ultimately, I argue that both liberalism and nationalism have struggled to go it alone, but both also struggle to go on together. I suggest that the republican alternative is potentially promising, but still faces stiff competition from nationalism. To beat nationalism, the republicans will need to offer citizens a more compelling relationship with the state than the nationalists offer. This will require a substantial expansion of citizenship rights. Because republicans reject the thick, cathartic, intimate relationship nationalism offers, they must provide a set of rights that citizens consider even more valuable, binding them in a thin way to the republican constitution.

This special issue is interested in whether libertarianism and classical liberalism can be productively paired with interstate federalism to overcome the limitations that state sovereignty imposes on them. To answer that question, we must first ask whether it is possible to separate the liberal project from the project of the nation-state. In this paper, I'll argue that liberalism and nationalism have become intimately bound up with one another. Each depends on the other, and both chafe at the limitations this imposes. These limitations largely take the form of state capacity problems. The nationalists are unable to achieve the kind of internal social unity they desire because of liberalism, and the liberals are unable to build the kind of global capitalism they want because of nationalism. In recent years, the two projects have tried to go their separate ways. But because they are fundamentally codependent, this separation is extraordinarily fraught. On its own, nationalism pursues a level of social unity that is fundamentally unsustainable. This results in the proliferation of an ever-larger array of group identities, each of which demands a level of political representation that it cannot enjoy consistently alongside the others. Sectarianism and gridlock follow. At the same time, liberalism is unable to generate political legitimacy as a standalone theory. It must be partnered with a compelling theory of political community.

The theory of community offered by nationalists is seductive, because it offers the extraordinarily cathartic jouissance of seeing one's values reflected back at one by the state. Liberal anti-nationalists have struggled to build a compelling alternative vision of political community. Out of

frustration, some liberals even conflate nationalism with statism itself, slipping into an outright rejection of states and polities writ large. Neo-republicans attempt to break this pattern, replacing the nation-state with a kind of interstate federation. Can it work? The infighting between liberals and nationalists potentially creates an opening for renewed republicanism. I'll argue that republican success depends on whether republicans can articulate a conception of citizenship that can offer something more substantive than the catharsis of national identity. I'll suggest that this might best be achieved through an expansion of the rights of American citizenship.

THE NATIONAL LIBERAL FRAMEWORK

The liberal thinker who best expresses how liberalism and nationalism work together is Max Weber. Earlier liberals, like Kant or Bentham, straightforwardly connected liberalism to notions of universal reason. Our freedom was anchored to "reason" as understood through the categorical imperative or the principle of utility. It was expected that we would use our freedom in a reasonable way, and it was believed that what counts as "reasonable" could be readily understood, with adequate public education. In the late 19th century, continental European liberalism took a Nietzschean turn, rejecting the possibility of consensus on any one value schema. This resulted in a liberalism that was more particularist, that was tied to specific nations and their individual value sets. In the literature, Weber is widely recognized as both a liberal and nationalist, though it is often pointed out that he does not fit neatly in either the "classical liberal" or "social liberal" category (Beetham 1989, pp. 311-323, Kim 2007, 2021). Disputes in the political theory literature focus not on whether Weber was a national liberal, but on whether Weber prioritized one over the other. Did Weber use liberalism for the benefit of the German nationalist project, or did he use nationalism to advance a neo-Kantian ethics? (Beetham 1989, Warren 1988, pp. 31-50). And what do we make of the break in Weber's corpus, from 1898 to 1902? (Ghosh 2016). For my purposes, Weber offers a detailed account of how liberalism and nationalism work together, one that helps us think about some of the problems that emerge when we try to take them back apart. The same cannot be said for most of the earlier liberals, whose liberalism was transparently universalist from the get-go.

For Weber, the collapse of the Christian consensus gave rise to a struggle over value. The German state was no longer built around Catholicism or Protestantism, but around the management of disagreement. In place of one dominant religion, there now arose "many gods and demons." Weber (1946, pp. 129-156) describes the situation this way:

... as science does not, who is to answer the question: 'What shall we do, and, how shall we arrange our lives?' or, in the words used here tonight: 'Which of the warring gods should we serve? Or should we serve perhaps an entirely different god, and who is he?' then one can say that only a prophet or a savior can give the answers. If there is no such man, or if his message is no longer believed in, then you will certainly not compel him to appear on this earth by having thousands of professors, as privileged hirelings of the state, attempt as petty prophets in their lecture-rooms to take over his role. All they will accomplish is to show that they are unaware of the decisive state of affairs: the prophet for whom so many of our younger generation yearn simply does not exist. But this knowledge in its forceful significance has never become vital for them. The inward interest of a truly religiously 'musical' man can never be served by veiling to him and to others the fundamental fact that he is destined to live in a godless and prophetless time by giving him the ersatz of arm-chair prophecy. The integrity of his religious organ, it seems to me, must rebel against this.

For Weber, this situation required a political synthesis of an ethic of conviction with an ethic of responsibility. To have conviction, individuals needed be free to choose their own ends, to choose which gods and demons to follow. For Weber a consciously guided life is one in which the soul makes "a series of ultimate

decisions” through which it determines “its own fate, i.e., the meaning of its activity and existence” (Weber 1949, pp. 1-47).

For Weber, the trouble is that because modern people want their convictions to enjoy the kind of recognition and supremacy that was once enjoyed by Christianity, they cannot be satisfied with the individual freedom to choose. Instead, they try to impose their ends on others, abolishing the very freedom that enabled them to choose these ends in the first place. Because the religious consensus has collapsed, never to return, these efforts to win a transcendent moral victory cannot succeed. All they can do is produce internal political conflict, ultimately culminating in violence. But the “truly religiously ‘musical’ man” feels that to hold back would be a betrayal of his convictions. As Weber (1946, pp. 77-128) relates:

You may demonstrate to a convinced syndicalist, believing in an ethic of ultimate ends, that his action will result in increasing the opportunities of reaction, in increasing the oppression of his class, and obstructing its ascent—and you will not make the slightest impression upon him. If an action of good intent leads to bad results, then, in the actor’s eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men, or God’s will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil.

To counter this, Weber argues that this conviction must be tempered by responsibility, by a willingness to prioritize the maintenance of the nation-state when convictions conflict with its maintenance. Weber argues that the German people need a particular kind of civic education to become politically “mature.” This civic education emphasizes the essential role of the German nation-state in securing freedom. In this way, Weber argues that for liberty to be maintained in a society of intense value conflict, all citizens must in some way subordinate their convictions to nationalism. He puts this very bluntly (Weber 1994, pp. 1-28):

We economic nationalists measure the classes who lead the nation or aspire to do so with one political criterion we regard as sovereign. What concerns us is their political maturity, which is to say their grasp of the nation’s enduring economic and political power interests and their ability, in any given situation, to place these interests above all other considerations.

The nation-state, therefore, protects the freedom of the people not merely by intervening to stop citizens from imposing their values on one another, but also by educating the citizens so that they will have the maturity to self-regulate. This means the nation-state is engaged in defending freedom in both positive and negative senses (Berlin 1969). It protects citizens from direct attacks on their freedom, but it also cultivates in citizens the two ethics of conviction and responsibility. By cultivating conviction, it equips citizens with the capacity and willingness to choose values for themselves. By cultivating responsibility, it equips citizens with the maturity necessary to subordinate their values to the national project.

In this way, nationalism is used to sustain the possibility of liberalism. Without nationalism, liberalism collapses into civil conflict, as the proponents of different values struggle endlessly for supremacy. Yet at the same time, nationalism depends on liberalism for its justification. Weber is a nationalist because nationalism protects citizens’ abilities to choose further values for themselves that go beyond mere nationalism. So, for the national liberal, liberalism relies on nationalism, and nationalism relies on liberalism. The one cannot subsist in the absence of the other.

A MUTUALLY FRUSTRATING CODEPENDENCY: ON CIVIC EDUCATION

There are, however, several areas in which liberalism and nationalism struggle to fit together. I’ll take a look at three trouble spots—civic education, trade, and identity. One of the issues with Weber’s framework is that, as he himself acknowledges, it is very difficult to combine conviction and responsibility:

I am under the impression that in nine out of ten cases I deal with windbags who do not fully realize what they take upon themselves but who intoxicate themselves with romantic sensation (Weber 1946).

This doesn't just lead to the person who has conviction without responsibility or responsibility without conviction. It also leads to people who have liberalism without nationalism or nationalism without liberalism. The liberal anti-nationalist is bothered by the limits that nationalism places upon autonomous choice. The nation-state's attempts to produce maturity often circumscribe the freedom to choose ends. If our ends must be compatible with nationalism and must never be pursued past the point at which they would undermine the nation-state, many value sets have to be neutered or toned down. This results in a superficial pluralism, in which the nation-state claims to defend freedom by circumscribing it.

This problem is worsened by the prevalence of illiberal nationalism. Illiberal nationalists don't take the nation-state's aim to be the protection of autonomy, but the political representation of a specific "people" with a discrete cultural, ethnic, religious, or ideological essence. This illiberal nationalism is best expressed in the work of Carl Schmitt. For Schmitt, each nation-state represents a people, and the people are defined as a group of friends who share a common enemy. He writes (Schmitt 2007, p. 28):

Rationally speaking, it cannot be denied that nations continue to group themselves according to the friend and enemy antithesis, that the distinction still remains relevant today, and that this is an ever-present possibility for every people existing in the political sphere.

The enemy threatens whatever it is that the friends consider valuable about their way of life, and there are no restrictions on what categories the friends can use to distinguish themselves from the enemy:

"Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy" (Ibid., p. 37).

When the illiberal nationalist identifies the nation with specific thick criteria, this further circumscribes the space for autonomous value selection. If the nation is not merely concerned with defending freedom, but with defending a specific national culture with specific characteristics, more and more values can be defined as contrary to that culture and therefore incompatible with political maturity. This pushes illiberal nationalists to make civic education more dogmatic and rigid. The "freedom" the state purports to defend becomes increasingly superficial. From the point of view of the freedom-loving liberal the national project becomes self-defeating. Instead of giving citizens the tools to autonomously choose their own values in a manner compatible with the maintenance of the state, the illiberal nationalist shoves a specific national culture down their throats.

Liberals understandably recoil from this, and this leads them to reject nationalism and to try to build a theory of freedom that depends less heavily on the nation-state curating the discourse through civic education. They want the state to defend freedom without acquiring education tools that can potentially be appropriated by illiberal nationalists. But here they reach the limits of the state's capacity. The civic education apparatus is precisely the thing that is necessary to prevent people from becoming illiberal nationalists. To abolish it is to allow immaturity to run rampant. This is the dilemma liberal anti-nationalists face. If they use civic education to cultivate maturity, they risk the appropriation of the education system by illiberal actors. If they don't use civic education to cultivate maturity, the failure to produce maturity allows illiberal attitudes to spread. So, if they refuse to wield the state's institutions to defend liberalism, liberalism will fall. If they embrace the state's institutions, they potentially strengthen them, and this means those institutions will be more effective if they are subsequently appropriated by illiberal actors. With no good options, many of these liberal anti-nationalists retreat into anarchist fantasies, attempting to hide from the political in the private sphere. Their retreat from the political cedes it to others, hastening the demise of the liberty they

prize. To preserve freedom, they must make use of the state's capacities, even though this will often involve expanding them. Tyler Cowen has made this point—that defending liberty will tend to grow state capacities, and therefore initial victories for liberalism often result in future defeats (Cowen 2007). He calls this the “paradox of libertarianism.” But it is just as plausibly the paradox of liberalism, as conceived by Weber. Liberals who try to avoid the paradox by embracing anarchism hasten liberty's demise.

The illiberal nationalists also run into trouble. They are trying to have a level of cultural unity that is not really possible in the absence of the kind of religious consensus that prevailed—only intermittently—in the Middle Ages. The pursuit of this unity in a context in which it is fundamentally unachievable pushes illiberal nationalists to go to totalitarian lengths, and even then, they are met with resistance and hostility. We can see this in the recent discussion of the 1619 Project and 1776 Project in the United States (*New York Times Magazine* 2019; The President's Advisory 1776 Commission 2021). Both of these civic education projects are grounded on the idea that the United States has a particular national essence. The 1619 Project critiques that essence while the 1776 Project celebrates it, but both projects agree that an essence exists, even as they disagree about both its content and the normative value of that content. Neither project proposes to offer a liberal national education, in which students are encouraged to develop both conviction and responsibility. Instead, each tries to shove a dogma down the throats of America's children. Both approaches meet endless resistance, and neither will succeed in establishing any permanent hegemony. The main consequence of the struggle is that the culture war further intensifies. These illiberal nationalists are also facing a problem of state capacity—the state lacks the ability to reinstate or replace the Catholic consensus. That level of thick unity is no longer obtainable, and attempts to obtain it end in tragedy.

A MUTUALLY FRUSTRATING CODEPENDENCY: TRADE

The second trouble spot is highlighted by Weber's own critique of global economic integration:

...the expanded economic community is just another form of the struggle of the nations with each other, one which has not eased the struggle to defend one's own culture but made it more difficult, because this enlarged economic community summons material interests within the body of the nation to ally themselves with it in the fight against the future of the nation (Weber 1994, p. 16).

For Weber, the German bourgeoisie are immature in part because they are unwilling to place national economic interests ahead of their own personal interests. Here Weber sharply conflicts with those who support contemporary global capitalism, and in recent years both liberal nationalists and illiberal nationalists have increasingly tried to rollback global economic integration in bid to defend what they take to be national interests and national cultures.

Ultimately, they haven't seen much success. Once globalization takes hold, it is enormously difficult to reverse. Any rapid cutting of trade links disrupts supply chains, spikes prices, and hurts growth rates. A government that tries to reverse all of this all at once will trigger a politically suicidal economic cataclysm. The more the liberal commitment to free trade is advanced, the more costly it would be to reinstate a regime of protectionism, and the more the hands of the nationalists are tied.

The inability to withdraw successfully from global capitalism forces the nationalists to look even harder for cathartic victories in the cultural realm. The nationalists cannot rapidly end US trade ties to China or Mexico. They cannot rapidly end British trade links with the European Union. But they can performatively reject the liberal economic order by transgressing against its norms. They can make punching bags out of immigrants and foreigners. They can reassert sovereignty in superficially radical ways without disrupting the economic system.

Donald Trump was very skilled at appearing like an economic nationalist while acting like a liberal. When he abandoned the Trans-Pacific Partnership in favor of a trade war with China, nationalists got very excited about bringing manufacturing jobs back home. But manufacturing jobs grew just 3.7% between

January 2017 and February 2019, after declining by 30% between April 1998 and January 2017 (Federal Reserve Economic Data). The minor gains were nowhere near enough to restore American manufacturing, and even these gains were wiped out by the coronavirus recession. As of April 2021, there are fewer manufacturing jobs in the United States than there were before Trump took office (Ibid.). As a percentage of GDP, manufacturing made no comeback, and the trade deficit with China remains very large (World Bank; US Census Bureau). Despite the bluster, the trade war didn't radically disrupt supply chains or break economic ties. At most, it sent signals to businesses that the economic relationship might be unstable going forward.

The coronavirus gave the Trump administration a potential opportunity. It might have used the crisis as an excuse to rapidly unwind America's economic relationship with China. The US economy was contracting quickly anyway, due to lockdown restrictions, and any further economic disruption could have been blamed on those lockdowns. But even in this unique situation, the administration was not willing to be substantively economically nationalist in a thick, robust sense. It wanted to give the appearance of being tough on China without taking the economic and political risks of being substantively tough on China.

At the same time, liberal anti-nationalists have been frustrated by nationalist resistance to further global economic integration. Donald Trump was unable to unravel the US-China trade relationship, but he was able to block the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which would have greatly increased US economic ties to many other economies in East Asia. Illiberal nationalist governments in Hungary and Poland have been unable to undo European economic integration, but they have helped to frustrate efforts to further integrate Europe. For many liberals, this is aggravating not just because it frustrates the advance of global markets, but because it obstructs us from solving a whole host of irreducibly global collective action problems. Different liberals highlight different problems. For Cowen, existing nation-states struggle to deal meaningfully with climate change, pandemics, intellectual property, and nuclear proliferation, due to lack of state capacity (Cowen 2007). For Brandon Christensen, the rise of illiberal nationalism is itself a problem that the nation-state is unable to solve (Christensen 2021).

Nationalists won't relinquish sovereignty to solve these problems, and liberals won't permit nationalists to tear apart the global economic system to re-assert their conceptions of sovereignty and the national interest. This leaves each in the way of the other. The nationalist has a project that has political appeal in the abstract, but would be economically disastrous to enact in practice. The liberals have lots of policy solutions for the global problems they recognize, but face steep political obstacles to their enactment.

Historically, national liberals have pursued a compromise position, in which the nation-state pursues an international market order. The markets satisfy the liberals, while the international system continues to defer to national sovereignty, even when this leaves pressing problems unresolved. Increasingly, this compromise is untenable. The problems that systems of sovereignty leave unresolved are too serious and too glaring for liberals to leave them be. Globalization has increased enormously over the past 50 years, and liberals believe it must be taken further still. For their part, the nationalists could live with a post-war system of tariffs, tight borders, and capital controls, but increasingly they chafe against the erosion of cultural and national distinctiveness in the era of globalization. It is hard to find a compromise position that is likely to satisfy both sides, and it is also hard to imagine either side surviving politically without the other. The liberals struggle to win elections without the nationalists, and the nationalists struggle to run the economy without the liberals.

A FRUSTRATING CODEPENDENCY: IDENTITY

The increasing conflict between liberalism and nationalism is not especially new. Liberal political theorists have been trying to deal with the problem since at least the 1990s. John Rawls attempted a reconciliation, urging liberal states to tolerate "decent" peoples even though these peoples are, by his own definition, non-liberal (Rawls 2001). David Miller attempted to formulate a new kind of "liberal nationalism" that recognizes the validity of national identity and of special obligations to co-nationals (Miller 1997). But these

arguments have not been able to defuse the tension. Nationalists view these accounts as insufficiently nationalist, and liberals view them as insufficiently liberal.

The intervention that has perhaps made the most difference is the push to replace the paradigm of nations with a paradigm of group identity. We can see this move very clearly in the work of Iris Marion Young. Young rejected nationalism as intrinsically oppressive:

The white male bourgeois unity and universality which implicitly defined the idea of the public in the nineteenth century reached its most arrogant development in nationalism (Young 2011, p. 138).

As you can see, Young also rejected “bourgeois unity and universality” writ large. This left her in the position of wanting a theory that protects distinctiveness and particularity without appealing to a nationalist frame. So instead, she introduces the “social group” or “group identity”:

A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way (Ibid., p. 43).

This conception of the social group is, however, not entirely different from Schmitt’s conception of the nation. Both Schmitt and Young focus on the sharing of a way of life as the thing that does the uniting. But while for Schmitt the nation is represented by a particular nation-state, Young does not give any of her groups states their own, instead arguing for a “politics of difference”:

In this vision the good society does not eliminate or transcend group difference. Rather, there is equality among socially and culturally differentiated groups, who mutually respect one another and affirm one another in their differences (Ibid., p. 163).

From a Weberian perspective, the trouble with this argument is not that it takes difference seriously, but that it does not take difference seriously enough. For Weber, intense conflicts over values threaten the integrity of the state. Without something that cuts across difference and promotes some level of unity, difference is liable to tear apart the social order. By attempting to dissolve national identity into many different group identities, Young sets these groups up to think of themselves as if they were nations, to want states of their very own. Young expressly classifies “cultural imperialism” as a face of oppression:

To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other (Ibid., pp. 58-59).

The trouble here is that groups are unlikely to settle for merely feeling visible. For nationalists, a key reason for a nation to want a state is to have its values represented in full. When the state reflects our values and identity back at us in a thick way, we get a sense of catharsis, a sense that we are represented and seen. A big part of the appeal of nationalism is that this recognition is very total. If the citizen identifies in nationalist terms and the state is communicating in nationalist terms, the state makes the citizen’s values and way of life feel real and transcendent. This is what Catholicism did for Catholic subjects during its era of medieval hegemony. The medieval Catholic subject sees their religious worldview reflected in the pious Christian king who does obeisance to God and the church. Catholic subjects get a sense not merely that their values are visible to the state, but that the state has defined itself in their terms. It represents them and their values in a thick, totalizing sense.

A state that is following a politics of difference cannot offer this kind of representation. It is encouraging its citizens to identify with groups, but it is also reluctant to give any of these groups the catharsis of thick representation. The groups are set up to want something they cannot have. The frustrations this generates eventually lead to devolution and separatism. Unable to take a nation-state for themselves, the groups seek to carve out semi-autonomous states within the existing nation-states.

This kind of thinking has played out in an especially pernicious way for Native Americans. The United States put Native Americans on reservations and created a doctrine of “tribal sovereignty.” It attempts to respect the cultural difference of Native Americans by granting tribes special legal autonomy within the reservations. But this autonomy also enables the American government to divest responsibility for outcomes on reservations. The tribes are not truly sovereign in any meaningful sense. The reservations are located on land the government deemed particularly low value. Economic opportunities on reservations are extremely poor relative to the rest of the country (Kocherlakota 2015). The concept of “tribal sovereignty” is itself defined by the American government, and the American legal system determines how the federal and state governments interact with the tribes. In effect, the tribes have been forced into ghettos and then encouraged to embrace those ghettos on the grounds that they exercise a fictional sovereignty over them. Their sovereignty is a way of papering over their segregation.

How did this happen? The only way that Native Americans could get a level of state recognition that would satisfy the group identity pushed upon them was to have some level of political autonomy, and once a group has a semblance of political autonomy the state that granted them autonomy no longer feels the same level of responsibility for them. By attempting to respect difference and avoid marking social groups out as an “other,” we eventually end up granting them a kind of pseudo-autonomy that results in their becoming precisely that.

This is precisely the opposite of what advocates of “descriptive representation” envisioned. They argued that by ensuring social groups are represented by group members, the quality of representation would improve, and the attachment of the group members to the polity would be enhanced (Mansbridge 1999, pp. 628-57). But Native Americans living on reservations have a lower standard of living than those living off-reservation in districts where it is highly unlikely that their representative is a member of their social group. The devolution of powers from Westminster to Scotland under Tony Blair did not increase Scottish attachment to the UK. Instead, it increased the strength of Scottish national identity, strengthened the Scottish National Party, and led to renewed calls for independence. The proliferation of social group identity in the United States will weaken—not strengthen—the connection of these social groups to the American political project.

As identity politics works its way through American society, group identity is more and more intensely felt by more and more people. Young’s social groups want a level of recognition that is incompatible with their rejection of nationalism. They want the kind of catharsis that nationalism offers, but they do not want to obtain that catharsis through the nation-state, because they view the nation-state as inherently oppressive.

This leads to a kind of anti-nationalist nationalism that results in pushes for alternative kinds of small, regional or local political units. These regional and local units are meant to provide the full recognition that illiberal nationalists seek from the nation-state. But instead, they lead to neglect from the central authority, which divests itself of responsibility for their fate. What’s more, to make these local polities feel real to the citizens who inhabit them, the governments that create them must devolve powers to them. As they devolve more and more powers to regional and local pseudo-autonomous units, state capacity declines, further intensifying collective action problems. The central government weakens itself by giving its powers away, while the new local units rarely accumulate enough power to solve problems on their own.

The fragmentation of the population along group lines also makes it more difficult to bring people together for cooperative purposes. Very quickly, groups begin worrying about whether they are being given enough recognition, and public deliberations are repeatedly sidelined by meta-disputes about whether the various groups are being respected and treated appropriately. By turning America into a society of groups,

this theory effectively turns America into a society of nations who do not recognize themselves as such. The country's political discourse begins to sound more like what you might expect to hear at the United Nations, where very often the national delegations spend their time expressing historical grievances and seeking recognition instead of trying to solve problems. The decision-making institutions increasingly cannot take meaningful decisions, because any decision would violate the way of life of some number of these groups. The institutions lose political vitality and instead become arenas for quasi-political performance art.

Along the way, the groups become much less liberal. Despite their commitment to difference, the demand for visibility causes each group to feel crowded out by the others. Visibility and recognition become zero sum, and each group's effort to be seen becomes threatening to other groups with other value sets. Individuals are lost in the shuffle, as the groups attempt to use their members as foot soldiers in value struggles with one another.

So, while there have been many attempts to reconfigure liberalism's relationship to nationalism, these attempts haven't overcome the fundamental problems in the relationship. At this point the tensions between the liberal and nationalist visions are too sharp for straightforward rapprochements of the kind offered by Rawls or Miller. At the same time, attempts to replace national identity with group identity not only reproduce many of the same problems, but create new problems by encouraging in the groups an insatiable desire to be publicly seen and recognized. Insofar as the groups value different things, these desires inevitably conflict with one another. The groups constantly get in each other's way, building up mutual animosity, reproducing the problem of sharp value conflict. We end up back where Weber started, with a series of conflicting factions unable to fit into a common political framework.

THE NEO-REPUBLICAN ALTERNATIVE

Instead of trying to salvage the liberal national alliance or redescribe it in identitarian terms, we might attach the liberal project to a different kind of political project. This project would need to generate the state capacity necessary to solve irreducibly global problems. It would also need to supply a sufficiently strong basis for political unity. Neo-republicans have tried to revive the republican tradition as an alternative to national liberalism. They argue that freedom is "non-domination." To be dominated is to be subject to arbitrary power, and power is arbitrary when it constitutes "an unchecked capacity for exercise of the will over another" (Honohan 2020, pp. 355-370; See also Pettit 1997 and Lovett 2010).

This emphasis on preventing domination through checks resembles the language of *Federalist* no. 51 (Madison or Hamilton, 1788):

In a single republic, all the power surrendered by the people, is submitted to the administration of a single government; and usurpations are guarded against by a division of the government into distinct and separate departments. In the compound republic of America, the power surrendered by the people, is first divided between two distinct governments, and then the portion allotted to each, subdivided among distinct and separate departments. Hence a double security arises to the rights of the people. The different governments will controul each other; at the same time that each will be controuled by itself.

In this way the neo-republicans maintain a firm commitment to freedom of a certain kind. Of course, the boundaries of non-domination are subject to dispute. Recent scholarship on Karl Marx, for instance, increasingly identifies him within the republican tradition, alleging that for Marx the wage labor relationship is objectionable in part because it is form of domination, not merely by the employer but by the system of market incentives. Indeed, for Bruno Leipold (2017), this is where Marx's originality lies:

Where Marx's originality lay, was in his analysis of the impersonal domination of markets. He argued that markets subjected people to arbitrary social forces beyond their control. The worker was thus not just personally dominated by the capitalist, but impersonally dominated by the market imperatives of capitalism.

What counts as "arbitrary power" on a republican view is therefore open to considerable interpretation. It's a view that is highly compatible with a robust debate over what freedom requires. Christensen also takes issue with domination, arguing that within federations the sub-units must have a "healthy fear of being dominated" by one another and by external polities (Christensen 2021). I won't try to settle the debate over how best to conceptualize freedom as non-domination here, but I do wish to emphasize that, as in a conventional debate about the meaning of liberty, many positions and interpretations are possible.

Instead, I wish to discuss in greater depth the way neo-republicans attempt to replace the nation-state. This replacement must work on two levels. First, the republic must offer citizens a compelling relationship to the state, one that can beat out the relationship offered by nationalism. Second, a federal republic revises the relationships between states, by replacing international relations with a federal umbrella. The ability of a republic to do the second depends heavily on its ability to do the first. It is because citizens see the republican citizen/state relationship as attractive that they are willing to sign up to a federal structure in the first instance.

Christensen's work pays especially close attention to the second component, to what is needed to successfully bring states together under a federal umbrella. He writes:

...some basic similarities are needed in order for federation to effectively take root among polities: 1) the units federating must have relatively similar institutional capabilities, 2) there must be a stronger polity within the realm of the potential republic willing to initiate federal discussions and suffer the petty jealousies of the smaller states along the way, and 3) there must be a healthy fear of being dominated by both the largest polity within the federation-to-be and by polities outside of the potential federative realm (Ibid.).

But while the units federating have all sorts of practical reasons to federate, all sorts of problems that require the state capacity that only a federation can provide, they can only federate with the support of their citizens. If the citizens harbor national identity, they are likely to resist efforts to federate even when federating is the rational thing to do from the point of view of solving pressing irreducibly regional or global problems. The question that needs answering is why the individual citizens should identify principally as citizens of a republic rather than as members of a nation.

We have described many of the benefits people think they get from national identity. For national liberals like Weber, national identity helps to temper social conflict by giving the citizens something to care about above and beyond their differentiated value sets. It's certainly plausible that commitment to a republic, to a set of constitutional essentials, could play this same role. Indeed, this is similar to Rawls' proposal that reasonable citizens subordinate their differentiated "comprehensive doctrines" to an "overlapping consensus" on, at minimum, "the principles and rules of a workable political constitution" (Rawls 2005, p. 149).

The trouble is that part of what makes the nation-state perform the role assigned to it by Weber is that the nation-state tends to thicken the kind of representation it offers. It promises the catharsis of totalizing recognition, and it offers itself as the representative not of a thin consensus on constitutional essentials but of a thick way of life. In other words, part of what makes the nation-state plausible as a vehicle for national liberalism is its illiberal nationalist formulation. It is the illiberal nationalists who make the idea of the nation-state compelling enough to citizens for it to plausibly play the unifying role to which national liberals assign it. The national liberal is therefore always in the awkward position of having to borrow from illiberal nationalism. The followers of Weber become too reliant on the followers of Schmitt, and the liberal national project therefore becomes dependent on the illiberal forces that seek to subvert it.

Rawls tried to resolve this problem by extending the overlapping consensus beyond the constitutional essentials to include a shared conception of justice (Ibid. pp. 164-168). The Rawlsian notion of justice sits in between the thin constitutional consensus and the thick consensus on a way of life. But by Rawls' own admission, even this consensus proves unobtainable when there is deep social division:

...if the liberal conceptions correctly framed from fundamental ideas of a democratic public culture are supported by and encourage deeply conflicting political and economic interests, and if there be no way of designing a constitutional regime so as to overcome that, a full overlapping consensus cannot, it seems, be achieved (Ibid., p. 168).

If we take division seriously, it means that attempts to thicken political unity won't work. The illiberal nationalist is promising a kind of deeply satisfying relationship with the state that is not actually possible. Even the Rawlsian is promising a consensus that is too thick. For republicanism to prevail, it must somehow make a thin consensus on the constitutional essentials more appealing than the fantasy of a thick consensus on a way of life.

Christensen points to the United States as an example of the viability of a republic. But the United States was constructed before the era of nationalism properly began. J. G. Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation* were not delivered until 1806, during the Jefferson administration (Fichte 2009). Insofar as we wish to characterize the work of Abbé Sieyès as proto-nationalist, his argument that France's third estate constituted a complete nation did not appear until 1789, when the ratification of the US constitution was already complete (Sieyès 2014). Those who would identify nationalism with the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648, have located the origins of the doctrine of state sovereignty rather than nationalism as such. In the 17th century, theorists like Hobbes did not frame the state as representing a national people with a particular thick cultural essence, but instead pitched it as a rational way of dealing with conflict among enormously diverse multitudes (Hobbes 1994). Westphalia was about the maintenance of peace. It was about the rights of states, rather than the rights of nations. Real, recognizable modern nationalism emerges with the French Revolution, and the French Revolution came after the American.¹

This means that after the American founding, the idea of nationalism slowly trickled into the United States from across the Atlantic. When it arrived, nationalism competed with American republicanism, and the history of this competition does not look great for the republican side. Nationalism is a potent force. It tends to dissolve pre-nationalist identity and culture. American civic education is increasingly not framed as a device for bringing up the citizens of the republic. Instead, it is pitched as a way of instantiating a thick national culture. This national culture is celebrated on the right and condemned on the left, but in both cases the republican understanding has been crowded out by thick narratives that describe the United States as essentially devoted to some comprehensive value set from its inception. Both factions want the education system to depict the United States in this way, though the left wants to paint American national values as fundamentally wicked while the right wants to paint them as laudable.

At present, American republicans find themselves on the defensive. They are fighting to preserve the republican tradition within the United States from attacks from both illiberal nationalists and group identity groups. Both of these factions emphasize the cathartic embrace of a thick value set, be it the values of identity groups or a national culture, at the expense of a thinner, less totalizing identification with the US constitution or with American citizenship.

Can republicans counterattack, and take advantage of the strife between liberalism and nationalism? Can they even defend their own position within the United States? The answer to both questions depends, on my view, on the ability of republicans to revitalize the concept of "citizenship." The idea of republican citizenship is pivotal, because it contains within it the relationship between the individual and the state. The more compelling republican citizenship is, the better republicanism can compete with nationalism.

A nationalist conception of citizenship is compelling because it suggests an intimate, totalizing, cathartic recognition of the individual's values by the state. What makes a conception of republican citizen-

ship compelling? The usual way of building a republican conception of citizenship is to give the citizens some valuable set of rights. These rights do not provide cathartic recognition, but they empower citizens to make meaningful decisions freed from the domination of others. Republican citizenship is compelling because the set of rights it protects are exceptionally extensive, especially by comparison with those who do not possess citizenship status. Existing political science literature argues that rights were critical in motivating the American Revolution (de Figueiredo, Rakove, and Weingast 2006, pp. 384-415; Rakove, Rutten and Weingast 1999). The failure of British institutions to meet a credible commitment to protect American rights both motivated rebellion and heavily influenced the construction of the constitution. American citizenship was and is viewed as valuable insofar as it entitles people to a more extensive set of rights than they can have without it.

While individuals prize the cathartic recognition that nation-states purport to offer, this cathartic recognition may be less valuable to them than a genuinely expansive set of republican rights. This is suggested by the mere fact that during the 20 years after the unification of Germany, more than 2.1 million Germans immigrated to the United States (Department of Homeland Security 2020). This amounts to a full 5% of the country's population in 1871. For these Germans, living in a nation-state based explicitly around German national identity was less attractive than living in a federal republic where the idea of Germanness had no special position. In America, these Germans not only enjoyed a more extensive set of political rights, but also had access to markedly higher living standards. German per capita income in 1871 was more than 40% smaller than America's (Bolt and van Zanden 2020).

To maintain America's status as a federal republic, Americans have to be reunited around the idea that they share a compelling political status as American citizens. This means that the best way to fight against nationalism is through political campaigns oriented around rights expansion. When Americans are focused on the rights of American citizenship, we are focused on a status we all share, and to which others potentially aspire. This cuts across cultural differences.

Which rights should be expanded? I'd like to distinguish between two categories of rights—rights that concern our ability to contribute political input, and rights that concern our access to economic outputs. Both kinds of rights are necessary, in some measure, to protect us from domination. Those without political input are straightforwardly dominated by those who have it. Those without enough economic output are dominated by their economic needs. Often unmet economic needs obstruct people from contributing political input, and the input they do contribute is heavily colored by the fact that they have unmet economic needs (Hamilton 2003).

Friedrich Hayek himself points out the need to provide a level of economic security if liberty is to be maintained:

Some security is essential if freedom is to be preserved, because most men are willing to bear the risk which freedom inevitably involves only so long as that risk is not too great (Hayek 2006, p. 137).

It may be that the only way to save the republican project from illiberal nationalism and group identitarianism is through an expansion of both input and output rights, including economic rights. Too many now look at the US constitution as incomplete or out of date. Instead of prizing these rights and their political status as American citizens, they indulge in fantasies of total cultural victory. Some of these fantasies call for the abolition of the senate itself (Dingell 2018; Geoghegan 2020). Listen to how Thomas Geoghegan justifies the dismantling of the federal system:

The very structure of the U.S. Senate makes it difficult for us to know who 'We the People' are. If North Dakota has the same power as New York to determine the will of the country as a whole, it is impossible for the chamber to act on behalf of the population as a whole—the people that we really are. And it makes it impossible for the country to be free. A country is free only to the extent

its government is subject to the will of the people as a whole, and if the country is not free, we are not free as individuals, either (Geoghegan 2020).

Geoghegan ignores completely the traditional republican conception of America as a federation of states. He takes it as a given that there is a distinct American people with a singular “will” that the government can straightforwardly represent. What’s more, Geoghegan goes so far as to deny that freedom is compatible with any other political arrangement. This is a nationalist interpretation of what the United States is, even though it comes from Geoghegan, a union lawyer and former Democratic candidate who likely does not think of himself as a nationalist.

These kinds of views will continue to proliferate unless the concept of American citizenship is revitalized. Its revitalization requires the emergence of strong majorities in both the House and the Senate that are committed to a meaningful, compelling expansion of the rights of American citizenship. The country badly needs a second bill of rights to refocus the public mind on American citizenship and its value. I won’t pretend to be in position to tell you which particular rights should be added or expanded. That is, necessarily, a question that should be decided through a robust debate that includes perspectives from all our states. But the need for rights expansion is clear. It is necessary not just to defend the existing American project from nationalist encroachments, but to take advantage of the global antagonism between liberalism and nationalism. Christensen’s goal—to expand the federal union as a vehicle for generating the state capacity necessary to address global problems—requires a rebirth of American belief in the federal union and its value. When the constitution was first instituted, it won over skeptics through the promise of a Bill of Rights. If it is to survive, much less thrive anew, rights expansion will be a necessary feature.

NOTES

- 1 For more on the origins of nationalism, see Ringmar 1998, pp. 534-549.

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